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Northern Uganda's formerly recruited youth in detention: A qualitative study of their transition process and imprisonment

By

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"The offense that was put against me is not true. People in my community suspected

me because I used to be in captivity in the bush. Today I am not happy,

there is a lot of uncertainty… how long am I going to be here?"

The Lord's Resistance Army forcibly recruited Jack when he was 14 years old and after spending two years with the rebels, he got rescued. Now, he is a young 23-year-old man who has been imprisoned for two years. He explains how his imprisonment is the result of on-going stigmatizations related to his past with the rebels. Up until today, he has never been convicted.

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Introduction

Northern Uganda is scarred by a war that has been waging over the region for more than twenty years. The most infamous aspect of the conflict was the forced conscription of tens of thousands of children and youth into the ranks of the Lord's Resistance Army, a rebel movement lead by Joseph Kony. During their time with the rebel group, the children and youth were exposed to harsh living conditions and were forced to commit atrocious cruelties. After being recruited for a period varying from a few days up to several years, a process of reintegration did follow. Humanitarian help provided by national and international bodies was established to facilitate the complex process of reintegration. However, interventions were not always successful and were the subject of criticism.

The creation of a more profound understanding of what a reintegration trajectory entails, needs to inform the design of more effective interventions to support formerly recruited children and youth. Nonetheless, little is known about how these children and youth fare over the longer-term and less is even known about those among them who ended up in imprisonment. Therefore this study, conducted 8 years after the war has ended in 2007, focuses on how formerly recruited youth in detention make sense of their reintegration process and imprisonment.

Based on the existing literature, the first chapter explores the phenomenon of child soldiering and zooms in on the forced conscription of children and youth in northern Uganda. Furthermore, the chapter gives an overview of the different aspects of the reintegration process and the role of humanitarian interventions. Next, the situation in the Ugandan prisons and imprisonment of formerly recruited children and youth are explored. Ultimately, the chapter elaborates on the theoretical framework that served as a lens for this study. Chapter two presents the research statement, goal and questions. The third chapter gives an overview of the methodological basis of this study by presenting the setting and participants, the data collection procedure, the method for analysis, ethical considerations and quality criteria. Chapter four presents the results of this study. Finally, in the fifth chapter, the results are reviewed in the light of the broader theoretical framework on transition. To conclude, implications for practice and research are proposed, and limitations of the study are presented.

I.   Literature review

1. The recruitment of children and youth in contemporary armed conflict

1.1.   A global phenomenon

Worldwide, more than one billion children live in areas affected by armed conflicts (Unicef, 2009). The widespread recruitment of children and purposefully using them as combatants in these conflicts is a violation of their human rights (Unicef, 2007) and is one of the most pernicious acts with harmful implications committed during times of war (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008a; Machel, 2001). Notwithstanding the international community's nearly universal condemnation (Child Soldiers International, 2012; Unicef, 2003), the involvement of children in warfare remains an ongoing reality in many modern armed conflicts (Child Soldiers International, 2012). An estimated 250,000 to 300,000 children are actively involved in armed conflicts in at least 87 countries around the globe (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008a).

The realities lived by children associated with armed forces or groups are very complex, as these boys and girls are often both victims as well as perpetrators of violence. They perform various roles within the armed faction as "fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or sexual slaves" (Unicef, 2007, p. 7) Internationally, a child soldier is usually defined as any person younger than 18 years (Unicef, 2007, p. 7). In this study, the term "formerly recruited children and youth" (FRCAY) is preferred, because young people above 18 years are also target of forcible recruitment into the ranks of armed groups, and many child soldiers exceed this age upon return. This broader definition is also in line with the African interpretation of "youth", defined in the African Youth Charter as "every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years" (African Union, 2006, p. 3).

This study focuses on formerly recruited children and youth in northern Uganda.

1.2.   Forced conscription in northern Uganda

With a time span of more than 20 years, the war in northern Uganda that officially came to an end in 2007 has been described as one of the deadliest and most complex humanitarian emergencies (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004). Since 1986, J. Kony and his notorious Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) started a merciless march through the northern region of Uganda by applying a variety of strategies aimed at civilians (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999).

LRA's dominant strategy was the violent abduction of civilians—of which two-thirds were children—and the forced recruitment into their ranks (Blattman & Annan, 2008; Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999; Pham, Vinck, & Stover, 2008). The estimated number of children and youth who were forcibly conscripted varies between 25,000 up to 60,000 (Annan, Blattman, & Horton, 2006; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008a; Human Rights Watch, 2006).

Each evening, thousands of child "night commuters" moved into the larger towns in order to escape the nighttime abductions in their outlying home villages (Betancourt, Speelman, Onyango, & Bolton, 2009). To protect their people from constant threat of LRA attacks, the government evacuated its civilians into huge camps, so called "safe havens". Confinement into these Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps was characterized by extremely poor living conditions and the breakdown of social structures. By the end of 2005, a total of 1,8 million people or 80% of the population was forced into these "rural prisons" (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010; Mulumba & Namuggala, 2014). In July 2007, the Juba Peace Talks between the LRA and the Ugandan government culminated into the signing of a peace agreement, making an end to the war and allowing people to return home (Annan, Brier & Aryemo, 2009; Mulumba & Namuggala, 2014). The rebel group however, although strongly reduced in number, continues operating in the neighboring countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, the South Sudan and the Central African Republic (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008b; Human Rights Watch, 2009, 2011).

2. Homecoming & reintegration: what's in a name?

The representation of FRCAY in research has evolved over time. On the one hand, studies uncovered high levels of mental health issues within the FRCAY as a result of stressors like exposure to violence and involvement in warfare, e.g. posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, etc. (Bayer, Klasen & Adam, 2007; Derluyn, Broekaert, Schuyten, & De Temmerman, 2004; Loughry & MacMullin, 2002; Moscardino, Scrimin, Cadei, & Altoè, 2012; Okello, Onen, & Musisi, 2007). Later on, researchers expanded these findings by arguing that stressors in the daily living situation of FRCAY also determine well-being upon return (Betancourt et al., 2010; Boothby, Crawford, & Halperin, 2006; Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Vindevogel et al., 2013b). On the other hand, the trauma-focused lens solely emphasizing negative consequences of child soldiering was shifted towards a focus on the exhibition of resilience and positive functioning among the majority of FRCAY when reintegrating into civilian life (Annan et al., 2006). This resilience perspective puts emphasis on both the presence of challenging stressors, as well as on the existence of supporting resources to be equally important determinants of FRCAY's resilient responses and well-being during the reintegration

process (Annan et al., 2006; Boothby et al., 2006; Klasen et al., 2010; Vindevogel et al., 2014; Wessels, 2009).

Currently, the dominant theorem embraces the idea that formerly recruited children and youth walk along a trajectory of risk and resilience formed by their experiences with the rebel group as well as daily life upon return, whereby focus has been put on the intermixed manifestation of challenges and resources during the process of reintegration (Annan et al., 2009; Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Rutter, 2006; Veale, 2010; Vindevogel, Wessels, De Schryver, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2014).

Quantitative and qualitative studies have engaged in exploring, unraveling and mapping the challenges and resources determining the course FRCAY's reintegration process. Emotional distress stemming from experiences within the armed group is a frequently mentioned challenge, but tends to form an ongoing form of severe distress only to a smaller group of FRCAY—more specifically those who experienced the most violence during captivity (Annan & Blattman, 2009; Denov, 2010) and those who spent a long time with the rebels (Blattman & Annan, 2010; Boothby, 2006a; Veale & Stavrou, 2007). For many FRCAY, one of the biggest sources of distress is a social one and arises for example from damaged relations, isolation, stigmatization, and rejection (Annan et al., 2009; Betancourt et al., 2013; Corbin, 2008; Vindevogel et al., 2013c; Wessels, 2009). Another major impact appears to be educational and economical, resulting from FRCAY's struggle to rejoin school, get training, generate an income,… (Betancourt et al., 2013; Blattman & Annan, 2010; Boothby et al., 2006a; Denov, 2010; Wessels, 2006).

There are several resources facilitating FRCAY's successful reintegration: own cognitive and behavioral efforts to deal with responses of trauma and grief, religion and traditional ceremonies, family acceptance and social support, and opportunities for education and livelihood (Annan et al., 2006; Betancourt et al., 2013; Boothby, 2006a; Steen Kryger & Lowe Lindgren, 2011; Vindevogel et al., 2014). Children and youth feel supported when these resources help them regain a sense of belonging and identity (Grimes, 2002; Vindevogel, Broekaert & Derluyn, 2013a), a sense of safety and normalcy in everyday live (Betancourt & Khan, 2008), a sense of hope towards the future (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007; Vindevogel et al., 2013a), and assist them to redefine themselves and shift their identity from soldier to civilian, cultivating meaningful roles and identities (Annan et al., 2009; Corbin, 2008; Veale & Stavrou, 2007; Vindevogel et al., 2013a).

FRCAY's experienced challenges and resources are often similar to those experienced by other children and youth not involved with armed groups (Blattman & Annan, 2010; Vindevogel et al., 2013c, 2014). This is because they are mainly linked to life in a post-conflict context whereby access to education, health services and other facilities is limited, and social networks

in general are affected (Corbin, 2008; Vindevogel et al., 2013c). Challenges and resources reach well beyond the direct exposure to warfare and emerge from multiple levels of influence surrounding all people living in post-conflict societies (Corbin, 2008; Psychosocial Working Group, 2003; Vindevogel, et al., 2013c).

In northern Uganda, when children and youth returned home, it was mostly because they succeeded to escape. Solely a minority of returnees was rescued or released. About half of all FRCAY returned homewards immediately, without registering at any authorities. The other half passed through a formal trajectory to facilitate the reintegration of FRCAY (Allen & Schomerus, 2006; Annan et al., 2006).

Several initiatives contributed to the formal process of reintegration. One of them was the establishment of Interim Care Centers—usually referred to as "reception centers" (Blattman & Annan, 2008; Wessels, 2004). Children and youth who reported their return were generally forwarded to the reception centers of (inter)national NGO's which provided "psychosocial care", aimed at mitigating the psychological impact of violence and promoting social acceptance (Blattman & Annan, 2008). The centers were occupied with the provision of medical treatment, counseling, family tracing and reunification, and education and skills trainings (Allen & Schomerus, 2006; Annan et al., 2009; Corbin, 2008). In addition, the reception centers often provided community sensitization programs aimed at creating a welcoming environment for returnees (Akello, Richters, & Reis, 2006).

An initiative by the Ugandan government was to offer blanket legal amnesty to all FRCAY through the Amnesty Act of 2000. Under this Act, "amnesty" equals a pardon, forgiveness, and discharge from criminal prosecution for all returnees who engaged in acts of rebellion against the government since 1986[1] (Afako, 2002; Blattman & Annan, 2008; Justice Law & Order Sector, 2012).

Although all these practices were founded on good intentions, there was little evidence of their efficacy and success (Annan et al., 2009; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2006) and thus have been the subject of criticism (Blattman & Annan, 2008). One of the major shortfalls was the scarcity of knowledge about returning children and youth, considering them as one large homogeneous group with similar needs, leaving many of them unacknowledged in their specific needs (Betancourt, 2008; Wessells, 2006).

Major criticisms on reintegration programs mainly highlight the implementation of western-based interventions which largely focused on the traumatized former child soldier, not giving thorough attention to the receiving families and communities, and neglecting local

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[1] In 2012, the "Declaration of Amnesty" was removed from the Amnesty Act. This means that amnesty is no longer granted to individuals who return and seek amnesty for crimes committed during the war. Amnesty certificates are no longer issued and there's no protection from prosecution any more (Agger, 2012).

perspectives and approaches towards the reintegration process (Akello et al., 2006; Betancourt, 2008; Blattman & Annan, 2008; Wessels, 2006).

In this regard, Akello et al. (2006) criticize Western-based reintegration programs. NGO's attempts to cure "bad habits" through counseling and talk therapy totally neglected traditional ceremonies—local approaches to reintegration and justice which can make a significant contribution to recovering social relationships—and therefore FRCAY never got the chance to be fully accepted as community members again. Another point of consideration cited is that FRCAY had to be reintegrated in communities who had lived in dire misery and abject poverty for decades. While the FRCAY got support from NGOs after being rescued, communities had to rely on irregular and intermittent aid from (inter)national organizations. The way the NGOs presented them as "innocent victims" was challenged by gossip about these supposedly innocent victims (Akello et al., 2006).

To date, the bulk of studies considering FRCAY's well-being and reintegration was commonly carried out in the reception centers where FRCAY temporarily stayed and the communities where they returned to, relatively shortly after these children and youth returned from captivity. Hence, a hiatus in literature is the lack of knowledge on longer-term evolutions (Betancourt et al., 2013). The few available longer-term studies emphasize the ongoing impact of recurrent thoughts and memories, stigmatization, and educational and economic marginalization in the majority of FRCAY (Boothby, 2006a; Denov, 2010; Vindevogal et al., 2013b). Boothby and colleagues' 16 year follow-up on FRCAY in Mozambique strongly indicates the existence of a "duration-of-time threshold", implying that youth who has spent several years with the armed group, exposed severe and ongoing difficulties in regaining individual well-being and social functioning (Boothby, 2006a).

There are two major factors creating an important void considering our knowledge on reintegration of FRCAY. The current evidence base lacks sufficient longer-term findings and virtually no studies with FRCAY were carried out in less obvious contexts. This study addresses both of these shortcomings by targeting FRCAY living in the forgotten prison context, several years after they have returned from captivity with the rebels. What can we learn from their stories regarding reintegration(-programming)? An essential part of ameliorating reintegration programs is to generate a profound understanding on what entails successful reintegration (Betancourt, 2013). By also including the stories of those FRCAY living in unusual contexts, years after return from the rebel group, more effective interventions that contribute to successful reintegration trajectories can be developed, and can ultimately create a better living environment for all children and youth in post-conflict societies (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Rutter, 2006; Vindevogel et al., 2013b).

3. Exploring Uganda's prisons: who, what, how?

Akello and colleagues' study (2006) showed that FRCAY constituted a significant part of Gulu district's[2] prison inmates. More specifically, they indicated that over 70% of inmates in the juvenile unit were FRCAY, imprisoned on charges of rape, assault, and theft among other crimes. Indeed, the earlier mentioned Amnesty Act legally implies that it was impossible to incarcerate FRCAY (who returned before the Declaration of Amnesty was removed from the Act in 2012) based on their past with the LRA. Any other data on FRCAY in Uganda prisons is absent in literature.

What we do know about the Ugandan prisons where these children and youth possibly end up? Roughly 73% of Uganda's prison inmates are youth between the age of 18 and 30 years. Underlying causes are attributed to (inter)national conflicts, unemployment and poverty (International Youth Foundation, 2011).

The 2011 report by Human Rights Watch uncovers the life inside of Uganda's prisons. These findings expose how poor living conditions, forced labor practices, violence, disease, and insufficient medical care are life threatening. The overcrowding is poignant, with prisons at 224% of their capacity nationwide. Inmates need to sleep tightly packed together, on one shoulder, and can only shift sides if an entire row agrees to roll at once. In addition, 65% of the prison's population has never been convicted. Remand inmates often have to wait several years for their case to get resolved (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

Some striking features of the Ugandan legal framework and practice can explain problematic overcrowding and overstaying on remand. Firstly, corruption is present at all stages—police, prison, judiciary—from arrest to trial: families get on with the police to extort money from a suspect, only those who have money are taken to court, one can be released if he pays a bribe, etc. Secondly, other than the police, private persons are entitled to arrest others on suspicion of having committed a crime. Thirdly, there are not enough judges, magistrates, and lawyers and complainants don't always show up in courtroom. Fourthly, during special events, the cities need to be cleaned up, so people get arrested for "idleness and disorder". Fifthly, people get arrested or convicted without sufficient ground of evidence, e.g. on the mere basis of witness testimonies without further proof. Lastly, inmates sometimes decide to plead guilty in order to fasten their release; pleading guilty and serving a sentence can go faster than to plead not guilty and await trial to be found innocent (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2011).

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[2] Gulu is one of the districts that were severely affected by the LRA conflict in the region of northern Uganda.

4. A theoretical framework

The social ecological perspective provides a framework to understand the impact of warfare and recruitment on the reintegration process and imprisonment of the FRCAY. This framework presumes that one's development is nested within, and shaped by, material, social, and cultural contexts—or multiple influence spheres (Boothby, 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The model identifies how interactions and relationships in these multiple contexts are key determinants in shaping one's immediate response to adversity as well as the person's longer-term outcomes (Boothby, 2006b; Bronfenbrenner & Evans). Warfare imposes a destabilization in the contexts of the FRCAY's ecology. The way their social environment has been harmed and its ability to recover from this destabilization, have a strong impact on the success of their reintegration process (Boothby, 2008; Miller, Kulkarni, & Kushner, 2006). The social ecology lens sketches a dynamic picture of how children and youth develop in changing social, political, economic, and cultural contexts that impose a mix of risks and protection to them, whereby they are portrayed as active actors rather than passive victims (Boothby, 2006b).

The comprehensive social ecological theoretical framework is strengthened and extended by two key theoretical concepts highlighting the importance of the development of a sense of "identity" and "belonging" during one's reintegration process (Annan et al., 2009; Corbin, 2008; Grimes, 2002; Veale & Stavrou, 2007; Vindevogel et al., 2013a). When reintegrating back into civilian life, FRCAY's sense of identity and belonging might be confused and provoke difficulties, as they have to leave their rebel-identity behind and need to reconnect with others again (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005; Wessels, 2006b). FRCAY need to redefine themselves and create meaningful social roles and identities as civilians (Annan et al., 2009; Corbin, 2008; Veale & Stavrou, 2007; Vindevogel et al., 2013a). Typically this process is also characterized by the cultivation of a sense of belonging to others through the establishment of close, sharing and caring relationships (Annan et al., 2009; Vindevogel et al., 2013).

When designing reintegration programs, we should acknowledge the complex ways in which child soldiering has an impact on the individual as well as the community. Therefore, interventions need to be holistic, comprehensive and address multiple levels, approaching the individual as well as its surrounding social ecology—the receiving war-affected society (Boothby, 2008). Moving way beyond stereotypical images and a single focus on the traumatized individual to focus on specific issues within a social ecological framework, will facilitate interventions that support children and youth's engagement to develop civilian identities and meaningful social roles, and eventually becoming full members of their society (Boothby, 2006a; Wessels, 2006; Vindevogel et al., 2013). Formerly recruited children and youth, as well as their

surrounding families and communities deserve support in this process of reintegration and redefining oneself (Annan et al., 2009; Wessels, 2006; Veale & Stavrou, 2007).

II. Research statement, goals and questions

1. Research statement

Initially, post-conflict programs for FRCAY were mainly designed to provide help to the homogeneous group of "traumatized child soldiers" (Blattman & Annan, 2008). Research focused on indicating mental health issues due to exposure to warfare and emphasized the negative consequences of child soldiering (Derluyn et al., 2004).

However, because of the vastness of war-related experiences during their time with the rebel group, generalizations on how FRCAY have been affected by their history were not founded (Betancourt, 2008; Vindevogel et al., 2011; Wessels, 2006). Moreover, research indicated that the reintegration process of the FRCAY was also determined by a variety of post-war challenges as well as resources emerging from daily life (Betancourt, 2008). FRCAY all had their own personal experiences shaping the pathway of risk and resilience during the course of daily life in the aftermath of war (Annan et al., 2009).

A lot of researchers illuminated the critical need for future research to pursue longer-term information on the ways warfare shaped trajectories of risk and resilience (Betancourt et al., 2011, 2013; Derluyn, 2011; Wessels, 2004). Furthermore, when analyzing the scars of war, it appeared highly important to include to a larger extent children and youth's own notion on how they have been affected mainly because our own preconceptions, e.g. the bias on trauma, are often too narrow to fully capture the psychological, social, cultural, and economic aspects that are relevant when pursuing successful reintegration (Wessels, 2004).

It appears that research concerning FRCAY was mostly conducted within the reception centers and communities where they returned to after recruitment, and that certain contexts have always been ignored. FRCAY in detention have hardly ever been described in literature.

This qualitative study is illuminating the perspectives of imprisoned FRCAY years after they returned from the warring faction, by exploring the FRCAY's subjective understanding of challenges and resources encountered during their reintegration process and imprisonment. The study's relevance lies in the fact that it addresses aforementioned gaps in literature by rendering visible the longer-term, personal perspectives of a forgotten group amongst FRCAY.

Understanding the longer-term perspectives on the challenges and resources experienced by this group can provide useful indications on the longer-term results and

shortfalls of intervention programs. Eventually, this study can contribute to the scientific evidence base that will allow appropriate guidance towards formerly recruited children and youth during reintegration after recruitment, during imprisonment and during reintegration after imprisonment.

2. Research goal

The aim of the study is to create an understanding on how FRCAY in detention experience the challenges and resources they encountered after their return from the rebels from a longer-term perspective, as well as the challenges and resources they encounter in prison. By analyzing the sense these FRCAY make of these challenges and resources, the ultimate goal is to formulate implications and recommendations for practice and research, which can address shortfalls of the reintegration programs for FRCAY in general, and to illuminate which interventions are specifically needed during and after detention.

3. Research questions

The research is predicated upon the following research question: How do formerly recruited youth in detention make sense of their reintegration process and imprisonment?

The following guiding sub-questions direct the study:

1) How do FRCAY experience challenges during their reintegration process and imprisonment?

2) How do FRCAY experience resources during their reintegration process and imprisonment?

3) How do FRCAY perceive a possible missed support during their reintegration process and imprisonment?

4) How do FRCAY perceive the support that is desired upon re-entry into society after imprisonment?

III. Methodology

1. Setting & participants

The setting for this study is the district of Lira. This district is part of the Lango sub-region of northern Uganda. Together with the more northward Acholi-lands, the Lango sub-region was one of the most affected areas of northern Uganda. The sub-region was the main battleground in a later phase of the conflict, scarred by the LRA's recruitment of thousands of youths. This research was conducted at Lira's Central Prison.

Lira district's prison houses a total of 694 inmates. In the male's section 619 men are being detained, whereas the female section is smaller imprisoning 75 women[3]. The ages of detainees have a broad range from 14 up to 70 years, with an average age of 27 years. The main charges wherefore men are generally confined are theft, robbery, defilement and murder. Women are mainly charged with indictments for assault, grievous harm and murder. The time a person spends in imprisonment varies between 3 months and 25 years. Out of the 619 men, 98 persons have actually been convicted, leaving the other 521 on remand. For women, 15 out of 75 were sentenced, leaving 60 on remand (Uganda Prisons Service, personal communication). These numbers suggests that, on average, the court has convicted only 1 in 5 inmate.

Statistics on the total number of formerly recruited people in incarceration at Lira prison could be obtained through this prison's authorities. Still, this did not imply a convenient recruitment of participants. Among other inmates, formerly recruited people are a "hidden population". Generally, they don't like to disclose their past publicly for various reasons, e.g. fear of stigmatization. To fully respect this, people were asked to participate by word of mouth. On the offset of the search for participants, contact was made with a small selection of inmates who fulfill leadership roles. Regarding their status as trust figures in the prison setting, these key persons have knowledge on the background of other inmates and have the mandate to ask for potential participant's cooperation. I discussed the purpose of the study and the search for a corresponding target group with the group of prison leaders. In addition, people who participated in an interview informed other inmates about the research. In that way, utmost discretion on the topic of the interviews towards other inmates was regarded. More and more participants trickled in one by one, eventually allowing me to gather an adequate number of stories for a saturated dataset.

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[3]Due to a strongly fluctuating in- and outflow of inmates, (small) changes in the registration of these numbers ought to be made daily to weekly, therefore it is important to mention that these exact figures are the result of a query on February 3, 2015.

Considering that I was dependent on the spontaneous presentation of participants, selection criteria were non-rigid. The only criterion, next to being formerly recruited by the LRA, was the current age of maximum 35 years, as the study focuses on earlier mentioned concept of "youth" in the African context.

Among the nearly 700 detainees, a total number of 90 persons had been recruited by the LRA: 74 of the 619 men; and 15 of 75 detainees in the women's section, had been formerly recruited (Uganda Prisons Service, personal communication). Proportionally, 1 in 10 men and 1 in 5 women are formerly recruited. Interviews with 20 people out of this group were conducted. Taking into account a gender balance, the sample included 11 men and 9 women, with an average age of 27. The majority of participants originated from Lira district. On average, participants were recruited at the age of 15. Half of the participants were recruited for a period shorter than 1 year (ranging from 1 week up to 8 months); the other half of participants was recruited for several years (ranging from 1 year up to 8 years). Overall, participants were recruited for a duration of 2 years on average. Participants were incarcerated on an average age of 26. Subsequently, the duration between return from the armed group and imprisonment is on average 8,5 years. Furthermore, average time spent in incarceration is 9 months. Out of 20 interviewees, 3 have been convicted to sentences ranging from 10 months up to 13 years[4].

2. Data Collection

Data were collected between September 2014 and January 2015. Interviews were conducted in the backyard of the prison's compound, where a sense of privacy could be created and the risk of interfering elements was the lowest. The duration of each interview varied between 1,5 and 2 hours. Questions were verbally administered in English and simultaneously translated into Lango—the native language—by a bilingual translator. Since the prison authorities did not allow any recording materials under no circumstances, it was impossible to obtain any recorded versions of the interviews. Therefore field notes, registering the stories of the participants, were taken as detailed as possible in order to still obtain a rich set of data, providing enough context and depth. I feel that my extensive notes still allow a "thick description" (Annan et al., 2009) and exploration of the process of reintegration and imprisonment.

The interview was based on the Life-line Interview Method (LIM)—often used to obtain autobiographical information on life events (Assink & Schroots, 2010; Arzy, Adi-Japha, & Blanke, 2009). The method is developed to study a person's subjective perception of the events determining the course of his/her life and allows understanding how one makes sense of

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[4] An overview of the demographic figures can be found in attachment A.

experiences and expectations relating to his/her past and future. Participants were asked to indicate the most significant peaks and lows on their lifelines, represented by flowers and stones respectively. Participants were encouraged to tell about these important life events or "turning points" more in depth. This tangible visual reconstruction facilitated the retrieval of memories and their occurrence in time. Eventually, the procedure resulted in an overview of one's life story based on a chronological ordered series of life-events on his/her lifeline (Assink & Schroots, 2010).

During the individual face-to-face interviews, a semi-structured in depth interview guideline was used. Building on prominent elements emerging from the literature review, the questions inquired into the participant's past process of return from the LRA back to civil society and eventually leading to their imprisonment, current situation in detainment and future expectations. The schedule was used flexibly and participants were key in determining what was narrated (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Participants were encouraged to share their story, regardless of the predefined list of questions.

This method was highly suitable to answer the specific research questions of this study. By using the LIM, it was possible to obtain information on how the FRCAY make sense of significant life events relating to their process of reintegration and imprisonment. The method allowed for the participants to freely share their own personal subjective experiences without being tied to a strict questionnaire. The LIM-based interview enabled to develop a profound, in-depth understanding of the way FRCAY experienced their life trajectory from the moment they returned from the rebel group up to the moment of speaking. This was achieved by creating a climate that facilitated and encouraged to narrate extensively about lived experiences with much detail and profundity.

3. Data Analysis

3.1. IPA in a nutshell

Data was analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) describe IPA as "a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (p. 1). Central in IPA is the individual who is an expert about their lived experiences (Van Hove & Claes, 2011). Since the research questions were drawn on the way FRCAY make sense of their own reintegration process and imprisonment, it was appropriate to analyze their accounts following the IPA method. There are three reasons why this study fits very well with the IPA method. These reasons seamlessly

connect with the concepts from the major fields in the philosophy of knowledge, which formed the IPA approach (Smith et al., 2009).

Firstly, through analysis, FRCAY's experiences on their reintegration process and imprisonment were explored in itself, simultaneously taking into account that these experiences are always socially ecologically framed. This is in line with the phenomenological aspect of IPA because it explores experiences in its own terms. Following the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, IPA "goes back to the things themselves" (p. 1) rather than fixing experiences in predefined and abstract categories. Heidegger and Sartre show us that our experiences are also a part of us being in the world in relations to others, emphasizing that we are no isolated creatures (Smith et al., 2009).

Secondly, the participants' narratives are the subjective understandings of their lived experiences. The intention of analyzing these experiences is to eventually understand them. Therefore, analyzing how they make sense of their experiences assumes making an interpretation of their stories. This is consistent with the theoretical axis stating that IPA is interpretative and thus informed by hermeneutics—the theory of interpretation(Smith et al., 2009).

Lastly, the study is primarily oriented towards understanding the subjective perspectives of a small cohort of FRCAY in imprisonment, prior to elaborating these findings into broader generalizations. This links up with the ideographic ground of IPA, as there is a big commitment to explore personal perspectives, situating participants in their specific context before moving towards general claims: what sense is *this* person in *this* situation making of what is happening (Smith et al., 2009)?

3.2.   *Roadmap for analysis*

Smith and colleagues (2009) provide the framework for the creative analytic process in IPA used for this study. IPA's essence can be found in its "analytic focus" that primarily pulls our attention towards the participant's attempts to make sense of lived experiences. In this light, analysis is an "iterative and inductive cycle" (Smith, 2007), characterized by a set of principles and common processes that can be applied in a flexible way (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005).

The analytic process consists of different steps according to Smith et al. (2009). Initially, the researcher begins to enter the world of the participant by reading and re-reading his/her stories. The researcher immerses oneself in the original account in order to get actively engaged with the data. The thorough data familiarization makes sure the participant becomes the focus of the analysis and provides a sense of the overall structure of the interview's content.

Subsequently, the text is divided into meaning units, annotated with a detailed set of notes. Through carefully examining the interview on a highly exploratory level, the researcher identifies how the interviewee talks and thinks about certain issues.

The third step is the development of emergent themes, based on the notes taken in the previous step. When transforming notes into themes, it is important to adopt a process of description and interpretation. This means that the themes must be a reflection of the original words of the participants, as well as the interpretation of the analyst. As the initial notes radiate certain openness, themes should feel more as if they have captured a sense of understanding.

Step four is the search for connections across emergent themes. After a set of themes has been identified, the next step is to develop a mapping of how the different themes can fit together. The aim is to produce a structure that points out the most important elements of the participant's stories.

The fifth step describes how the previous process is repeated on the accounts of all the other participants. When moving on to the account of another participant, it is important to remind that each case is unique and is treated on its own terms, respecting its individuality.

Step six involves the search for patterns across al cases. This last stage involves the fuse of emergent themes across all interviews. The analyst organizes different themes, searching how themes are nested within other themes. This process results in a structural overview capturing patterns across all cases. The identification of emergent themes and sub-themes was supported by the use of the software program for qualitative data analysis NVivo. This is primarily due to its "in vivo coding" feature, which allows the researcher to stay very close to the accounts of the participants when inductively searching for emerging themes (Vindevogel et al., 2013).

Finally, after all themes are identified, they are further linked to broader theoretical concepts. (Smith et al., 2009)

4. Ethics & Quality

Conducting research is engaging oneself in a balanced act between the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the protection of the rights and needs of the participants (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). In research with vulnerable groups and hidden populations, ethical practice must be at the forefront of the agenda (Betancourt, 2011). The main goal is to protect participants from possible harm at any rate (Hugman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2011).

Therefore, an ethical guideline was thoroughly discussed together with each participant prior to the interview. Basically, this guideline helped monitoring and safeguard participants' rights throughout the course of the entire study. Besides the goal of the research, the guideline actively explained ethical issues related to three key ethical principles regarding research with

human beings: "autonomy", "benefice", and "justice" (Orb et al., 2001). In addition, all participants signed a concise informed consent, declaring to have understood all the information discussed through the guideline, giving the researcher the permission to use their accounts for the research, and confirming voluntarily participation. It goes without saying that ethical reflections have been made throughout the entire course of the research project and, therefore, were associated with criteria for good quality research (Angucia et al., 2018).

Yardley's (2000, 2008) four principles for assessing quality, according to criteria appropriate to qualitative study designs, formed the pluralistic and sophisticated stance (Smith et al., 2009) that nourished this study with sufficient quality.

Firstly, I adopted a "sensitivity to context" by being attentive towards the socio-cultural milieu, e.g. taking account of the expertise of local people—the interview guideline and results of analysis were discussed with a local team of professionals (Betancourt, Yang, Bolton, & Normand, 2014), the existing literature on the subject, and the obtained material from participants by putting immersive and disciplined attention to carefully unfold the participant's accounts.

The second principle used is "commitment and rigour". Personal commitment was established by engaging extensively in the attainment of methodological quality and theoretical depth. Rigour appeared from the pursuit to carry out a study that has a sufficient amount of depth and is done thoroughly and systematically. This is for instance reflected in the way participants' accounts were analyzed very profoundly, systematically following the outlined steps of IPA.

Thirdly, Yardley refers to "transparency and coherence". The aim was to develop a study that makes sense as a consistent whole by matching the theoretical approach, the research questions, the methods, and interpretation of the data. In addition, the reader is able to read exactly what was done, and why. Furthermore, considerable reflexivity is put in specific ways in which it is likely that the study was influenced by my own preconceptions. The interview guideline and results of analysis were for example discussed with the local team of experts.

Finally, attention has been put to "impact and importance". This study continues on what we already know, to take us a step further; by answering questions that matter to people and to society, it tells the reader something useful and therefore will undoubtedly have impact and importance (Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000, 2008).

IV. Results

Initially, I started by reading the interviews to get familiarized with the data. During the process of initial reading, the stories narrated in the interviews were compared to what was indicated on the lifelines. On the lifeline of each participant, imprisonment was indicated as the last significant turning point. All of the turning points indicated before imprisonment were related to family and community on the one hand and to education and livelihood on the other hand, by all participants.[5] Eventually I decided to take these turning points as the guiding themes for further analysis. During the next steps, the interviews were analyzed more profoundly and fragments were clustered according to aforementioned themes, with the support of the NVivo software.[6] In this way, patterns could be discovered in the different stories and are described in the following results.

Family & Community

The narratives of all participants illuminate how their reintegration process before imprisonment was characterized by the search for a new sense of identity and belonging. The strong need to break with the former rebel-identity, to start a new life and develop new meaningful social roles and relationships with others, is interwoven throughout all of their personal stories. In this process of reintegration, family and community members played a key role.

The accounts of all the participants demonstrate how the presence of significant others was of immense value to them, as they often talk about the strong need for warmth, closeness and love. All participants' narratives highlight the importance of the presence of a caring family, as well as close friends. All of them express how they deeply valued strong relationships, put effort in (re)building these relations, and pursued acceptance. Ronald elucidates how he sought for rapprochement with his friends and appreciated his mother's support:

> *"I was overthinking about the past a lot, it was such a bad feeling. It helped me to join friends, play music, and play cards with them. Also, my mother helped me by talking to me and telling me that it is good that I am back. It was so helpful because she made me happy,*

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[5] An overview of the lifelines can be found in attachment B.

[6] The structure tree of themes and subthemes generated during the NVivo coding process can be found in attachment C.

> *I could feel something was happening, it was a sign of love. I was ready to take up my life again."*

Most of the participants indicate the importance of their family giving guidance and advice to "forget" what happened in the past, to leave the past behind and to look forward to the future. Sarah explains:

> *"I was recalling past events, had nightmares, and felt like being alone when people made noise. But my family advised me to forget about the past and start a new life. So that's what I did. That advice helped me, my worries got less and it changed my life."*

Interviewees express how this discourse created opportunities for them to distance themselves from their past. The majority of participants refer to the internal desire to forget and avoid memories linked to their time with the rebels, tying them to an identity they wanted to liberate themselves from. Anna narrates:

> *"I was worried about my father, sister and friends, and felt like staying alone, I was also recalling past events and having flashbacks of killings. I felt bad about it, but what's next? My father is not coming back anyway. So I decided to listen to the advice and forget about it and started praying a lot. You can keep on thinking and thinking… but it happens that people die… you have to move on and become a normal person again…"*

In addition, a majority of interviewees indicate that close family members were important actors to provide protection from painful comments. They felt supported when they could count on one or a few persons who gave them advice on how to handle challenges with the community, such as the advice to not listen to and not mind about painful insults. Furthermore, for most of the interviewees, family is considered to have had an essential part in facilitating their interaction with members of the community; through teaching them how to act with others, through encouraging them not to stay alone all the time, and through providing tools for conflict mitigation, such as the advice to report to an (legal) authority in case of problems instead of starting a fight. Moses narrates:

> *"I was insulting others, being disrespectful and annoyed very fast. My family was my only support. They gave me advice like not to fight with others and told me that if somebody was hurting me, I should call the council instead of fighting. They taught me that the others were my brothers and sisters and I shouldn't fight them."*

The support of the family appears important, since the participants generally experienced difficulties in being accepted in the community again. More specifically, the big majority of interviewees describe negative and hurtful experiences caused by community members and sometimes even by relatives. Participants talk about verbal abuse and exclusion from activities and life in the community. Community members did not always allow for them to become the persons they aspired to be, namely fully accepted and active actors in that community. Interviewees address most common reasons for being harassed as community's suspicions of them to have taken part in raids or killings, to still have the aggressive behaviors of a rebel, and to be a risk to make the LRA come back.

Strikingly, from the interviews it appears that the ten participants who were recruited for several years had to deal with the most persistent and long-lasting forms of stigmatization. Irene, who was recruited for 6 years, explains the stigmatization she experienced:

"People disliked me and hated me because of the long time I spent in the bush. They hated me but didn't say it out loud; they didn't say it directly to me. They were talking negative to my children, calling my children names like "olum olum" which means "born in the bush". I got chased away by my uncles. They told me I am not married and I don't bring anything good and my kids will be a burden."

Whereas a majority of participants narrates to have been challenged by the community, about half of the participants also experienced how the community made efforts to approach them, by involving them in communal activities like digging and playing games. They describe how these efforts made them not to feel alone, to feel cared for, to feel forgiven etc. It is remarkable that, more specifically, the ten interviewees who were abducted for a short period of time—a few weeks up to a few months—explicitly felt how the community reached out to them. Ismael, who was recruited for 4 months, illustrates:

"The advice given by community members and friends was very helpful: they asked me to join help them digging, encouraged me not to overthink. They told me it's good that I am back and I don't need to mind about people who call me names, they said that it's good that I am back and safe now."

All of the participants endeavored to reconnect with their family and community after their return from captivity. In this process of reintegration, social services provided by NGOs and by the government, took part. Most interviewees express how they felt really helped by the counseling provided in the reception centers and the IDP camps. They valued the encouraging

words emphasizing the importance to be back, and the advice given to forget the past and how to connect with others again. Participants describe how this support enabled them to reduce emotional and behavioral challenges, to break with their identity as a rebel, to reconnect with the community and move forward. Others also felt comforted by the fact that a professional was taking care of them. Jacob narrates:

"The counseling made me strong and made me to know that those things like war happen. It was important that when I didn't feel well, someone was talking to me, it made me feel so relieved. They taught me that I needed to move on with life and never give up. My worries got less and it helped me to become a normal boy again."

At the same time, the inadequacies of social services created challenges threatening participants' successful reintegration. Several participants never got the opportunity to receive professional support, although they felt in need of counseling, as much as other returnees who received support did. Scovia explains:

"I missed counseling, those people could have guided me in the right direction to follow like to keep yourself busy with friends and don't go for doing bad things."

Others, who did have access to support through counseling, describe that counseling was not thoroughgoing enough, expressing a need for "more". Generally, the participants' accounts reflect on the way (inter)national bodies were not always able to give the much needed, full necessary support. Sam narrates:

"Counseling in IDP was not helpful, these people came less than 2 times to see me, they were not even following me up."

Illustrative is the advice Isaac gives to families and communities, but also to (intern)national organizations, receiving formerly recruited children and youth:

"Be merciful and forgive those who come back. Don't divide children in 'from the bush' and 'not from the bush', they should stay together and show equal love. Don't leave them out, let them be part of community and all activities, take sick children to the hospital and don't ignore them, don't let them die like animals. Stay in harmony and love. Help them and give good advice. Don't forget about us, include us in the budget, and give us amnesty 'cause we

were forced and didn't go there willingly. Look at us as still being a part of citizens of the community and the country, don't neglect us."

Isaac's account reflects thoughts that are commonly shared amongst the participants. It's illustrative of the importance they attach to feel forgiven by others and to let others know that they were forced to commit atrocities. They want to belong to their families and communities again and feel the need to be supported in the process of reintegration.

The majority of the encountered challenges, however, seemed to diminish over time for about half of the participants; youths talk about the gradual disappearance of emotional and behavioral struggles and a growing acceptance by communities. Especially participants whose time spent in captivity was limited to the maximum of a few months, seemed to eventually put their past largely behind them, like Jacob, who was recruited for 8 months, clarifies:

"For now, most of the time I consider my past as a part of life and it doesn't cause so much pain anymore."

For about half of the participants, their past with the LRA was conceived as a continuous burden chasing them. Youth who spent several years in captivity had to deal with recurrent thoughts, feelings and behaviors related to the past, even years after they had returned from the armed group. Their narratives also indicate persistent difficulties to be accepted by their communities and the hard-shell tendency to permanently stigmatize formerly recruited youth. Although the hands of time were easing burdens to a certain level, their accounts indicate the long-lasting effects of their past. The tenacity of the stigmatization made Daniel, who was recruited for 2 years, to leave his homeland, he explains:

"I was living in my mother's homeland and that was a problem. There were a lot of challenges I always faced so I decided to leave that village and live somewhere else. My uncles were challenging me, they said I was from the bush and was always planning to kill them, they were accusing me of being a rebel, even up to now…"

Nevertheless, the majority of them express that they succeeded to establish an "okay" life wherein they felt quite happy right before they were imprisoned; notwithstanding the fact these twenty youths each have walked a unique path. The accounts describe the way they were able to establish a meaningful social role and sense of belonging, despite ongoing challenges. Isaac's

testimony is illustrative of how the participants generally make sense of this meaningful social role and sense of belonging:

> *"After camp I went back to the village and was now the head of my family. Life was hard although I was also encouraged not to overthink and move forward! There was no stigma from the community anymore and they didn't leave me out, I was friendly to everybody. I felt like I was a part of the community and was happy with my living situation. Due to hard work, farming, we could overcome the poverty. I was the head of my family and was building us some place to stay, we had food, I was paying school fees for my younger brothers and sisters…"*

Education & livelihood

All participants illuminate their search for a new sense of identity and belonging through statements related to education and livelihood. They talk about (re)identifying themselves and (re)connecting with others emphasizing the importance of education, skills trainings, employment, and income-generating activities.

Going (back) to school, getting trained in life skills, and the engagement with income generating activities, are commonly perceived as one of the most essential resources supporting participants to release negative thoughts, feelings and behaviors, and to break with their former rebel-identity. Jack indicates:

> *"Because of the support I got, I could go back to school and I was a new boy and had good behaviors. I was together with my friends and had no problems anymore."*

Opportunities for education and livelihood are generally considered re-installing a sense of being "normal". Obtaining knowledge and skills was perceived as enabling them to do good things with their life and give a new direction to life. Participants narrate how getting an education or earning an income generate a new sense of mastery and control over their lives. They express how feeling the ability to really change things was key to experiencing new possibilities in life and a bright future, for example cited as "education is the future of tomorrow". Scovia narrates:

> *"Because my family supported me with some capital, I became a businesswoman. Because of my business, I felt like I was part of the community and was happy with my living situation. I*

was always busy, I was responsible for my own money, I was independent and free."

Participants commonly explain how education and livelihood were important factors related to their sense of belonging. Most of them consider going to school and engaging in productive and valued work, e.g. farming, running small businesses… important factors in being able to reconnect with their families and communities. Through "hard work" they tried to reconnect with others. Furthermore, feelings of being responsible for their own income and being independent from the support of others were highly valued. By helping to support even other family members by paying the school fees for siblings or their own children, they consider themselves to have been valuable persons and fulfill important roles and social identities. Jacob illustrates:

"I was a farmer and a tailor and life was very okay. I was having almost everything I needed in my life. I was making money and taking care of my brother and two sisters, they were all in school and I was paying for them the school fees. I had many friends and didn't stay alone very much. Feeling home in the community was very important for me. I was contributing to the development of the community a lot, like I was helping with cleaning the road, digging, I did some work at the school…"

Overall, participants consider getting an education, skills training or generating an income very import in becoming the person they aspired to be. Therefore, they appreciate the support they got on these matters from family and (inter)national organizations. Nevertheless, a lot of them perceive this support as being "not enough" and clearly express the wish to have received more support in their lives: psychological, educational, material and economical. Some of the participants were deprived from any support and consider this lack of opportunities obstructed their reintegration for several reasons: there was less distraction from negative feelings caused by recurrent memories, it was harder to create a meaningful identity and to be accepted by the community. There was the feeling of having lack of control over the environment because of the inability to obtain some basic needs for example. Jacob narrates:

"Before my abduction I went to school and after my return I didn't go back because nobody could pay for my school fees. I don't feel good about it because I know it is important to go to school. But now it's too late, there's no way I can start again… The fact that I didn't go back made my life hard. As a result, I am missing a lot of things like knowledge about the law, reading magazines and sign posts, knowing the English language…"

The support provided by social services was perceived as a source of frustration to several interviewees, especially when help suddenly stopped or when support was promised but not given. Some participants experienced the fact that they saw how others did receive support and they did not, despite an equally big and pressing need, as very hurtful. Ronald explains:

"I didn't get any counseling, nor an Amnesty Certificate. Others were taken back to school and given seeds, matrasses, activities,… I received no help because I was taken straight back to my home I guess. But I also needed these things… I felt so bad about it…"

Despite the often limited educational and economic opportunities, a majority of participants narrates to have reached a certain level of contentment right before their imprisonment. Considering their 'being' at that moment, most of them perceive they established a meaningful social role through studying or engaging in productive activities like having a small business in combination with farming. Jacob sketches:

"I was a farmer and tailor, life was very okay. I was having almost everything I needed in my life: I was making money, had many friends, and didn't stay alone very much. I was taking care of my brother and two sisters, they were all in school and I was paying the school fees. Being home in the community was very important to me. I was contributing to the development of the community a lot: I was helping with cleaning the road, digging, I did some work at the school… In the beginning I was very poor and by then I was at least having some money to pay for school fees and other things."

Imprisonment

Half of the participants link their current imprisonment to their past as formerly recruited youth. On the one hand, several interviewees consider their imprisonment to be the result of the behaviors they still carry along since their time "in the bush". They illustrate how their behaviors were the outcome of the way in which they were treated and of the acts they had to perpetrate themselves during their time with the rebels. Irene, who was recruited for 6 years, explains:

"I am here for fighting and assault. Because of my staying in the bush and the things I had to do there, I fight easily. When I came back I was not normal; my mind was not functioning well. I was easily annoyed and fighting. That behavior got less because I was praying almost every day. Sometimes when I'm annoyed it comes back and even up to now I have to pray."

As Irene also further elucidates, some participants were never able to totally distance themselves from these behaviors and indicate that certain triggers, such as feeling annoyed or attacked by someone, bring back these behaviors easily.

Other interviewees, on the other hand, explain the cause of their imprisonment by pointing out the stigmatization they felt. They attribute being accused of committing certain crimes to the tendency of people in their communities to easily point a finger at them when something bad happens. The assumptions of others were commonly based on their knowledge about the participants' history with the rebel group. Jack, who was recruited for 2 years, narrates:

> "I was brought here on suspicions of defilement. I am not happy here because the offense that was put against me is not true. People in my community suspected me because I used to be in captivity in the bush."

The majority of the ten people who clearly indicate the relationship between their past with the LRA and their imprisonment—either by indicating their own behaviors or by pointing to stigmatization—are the ones who were recruited for several years.

The other half of participants does not feel like there is a connection between what happened in their past and their detention—a majority of them were recruited for a few weeks or months. The vast majority of this group considers their incarceration as a case of "bad luck". Moreover, they feel like they were at the wrong place at the wrong time. A few of them make sense of their imprisonment by considering it as a part of a bigger divine plan created by God.

> "I overthink a lot… first I was living in the bush and when I finally came back, I found out that my mom and dad died. Then I got a very annoying stepmom, but later I succeeded in moving away and feeling happy for once. But then I get arrested and have problems again. I am wondering how my life is going to end… so many problems…"

Dorcus expresses a feeling commonly shared amongst these participants. They experience a sense of being caught in a never-ending series of misfortune chasing them during the course of their lives. Their confinement is regarded as yet another setback on their path.

Overall, the minds of a majority of interviewees are plagued by strong feelings of an unjustified confinement. They do not understand why they are being imprisoned and have the feeling that they did not do anything wrong.

The feeling that "life in prison is not easy" emerges from all of the accounts. The harsh living conditions and environment are a thorny issue dominating all of the participants' lives. The lack of a nutritious diet, shelter, healthcare, among other basic needs, and the hard labor they are forced to do, are strongly put forward when describing the hardships of daily life. Furthermore, a vast majority illustrates how they do not have any planned activities the whole day, every day. Several participants indicate that joining the basket makers, tailors or carpenters for example, is highly desired as it would provide them a daily work routine and some kind of an income. The combination of feelings regarding an unjustified imprisonment and the lack of activities generates the idea of wasting time in prison, expressed by several interviewees. Jacob reflects:

> *"I'm not happy here. I'm missing my friends, family, and children… Nobody is paying for their school fees. I'm not free and all the time I have to be indoor. There's no good diet here, even when I'm sick there is no medicine. There is also nothing to do here, I am wasting my time. A lot of overthinking is really disturbing me. When I look at the welfare here, it is bad: we have no beds, the room to sleep is too small, the environment is bad. When you enter it is very hot, there is no fresh air, there is no big compound. I was used to play football on a big field, I can't do any exercise…"*

Another stinging thought for a majority of youth is the fact that they left behind their families at home. They express how they don't really know what is going on with their families and explain how they are worried because nobody is protecting and providing them due to their absence. In addition, participants illustrate how family visits are often limited due to constraints regarding family's own resources to get at the prison's location or due to prejudices towards their criminal relative. They also describe the negative reactions from the community towards the 'perpetrator', and therefore community members often don't visit the participants. A lot of them indicate that they had to leave their businesses, farming activities, and educational programs behind, causing an additional source of worries. The separation from their families and not feeling supported by people at home is very painful to the participants in general, harming their sense of belonging in multiple ways. In addition, participants indicate that everything at home will be "gone" when they return, for example that their land will be grabbed, implying that they will have to start all over again. Jacob reflects on this lived reality:

> *I don't have anything right now, there's nothing left, I am not sure where I can start from once I get home again, my cows are not there anymore, my children don't go to school any more. I fear that my kids might become like me."*

The feelings of an unjustified incarceration, the harsh living conditions, the few available activities, the separation from family, and being left out by the community, are frequently recurring elements, generally indicated as contributing to a feeling of hopelessness. The participants mention another reason aggravating this feeling: with only 3 convicted participants the majority of interviewees are still held captive based on suspicion. Interviewees are not sure when their complainants will show up, when their case will be handled in court, or even if somebody is busy investigating their case. The big uncertainty enwrapping the view and perspective towards the future is a major hindrance in the search of hope as Ronald, among others, narrates:

> *"I am not happy here, I had to leave my business and I am here as a suspect, I was not the one who killed the person. I also think about my family a lot. The place to sleep is very squeezed, and food is bad, like for pigs. There is only one clothes I can wear, there is sickness, and we are restricted in one place. I don't know what is going to happen with me tomorrow, will I be released or not? Tomorrow is now dark…"*

The melting pot of challenges has far-reaching and profound consequences for a number of the interviewees. More specifically, one third of participants narrate about the return of painful memories and behaviors related to their time during captivity and/or compare life in prison with "life in the bush". Participants describe, for instance, having nightmares and flashes of intrusive memories related to the adversities they experienced. They attribute this to the way they are treated in prison and to the excessive time to think, as they have nothing to do. Other examples are the headaches and irritability because of the overcrowded noisy space they are tight to. Some evaluate life as a recruited youth and life as a prisoner as equally bad or even say that life "in the bush" was relatively better. Their experiences of captivity with the rebel group are relived in the present day. In this regard Stephen's (recruited for 4 years) is illustrative:

> *"I am not happy here because life is not easy. I am thinking about my business and my family. Sometimes we go out for digging the whole day, I feel hungry, there is not enough space to sleep, we have to lie on top of on another* [crosses hands]*. Even up to now it sometimes happens that nightmares about my time in the bush come back. One time I woke up and I caught myself squeezing the neck of someone else. Tuesday, I got beaten up here. People said I was climbing the walls to escape. Sometimes I just feel like running away, so I can say that life here is almost the same as in the bush. All my memories from the bush come back here. Also, it is because I come from the bush that the other inmates accused me. I was just standing near the fence because I want to be alone sometimes. Memories are*

coming back because of the way they treat us, feed us, and the way we have to sleep. I also
get easily angry: they order me to do something and I don't want to do it. I am also annoyed
easily: some people say my case is useless and I will stay here forever..."

The big majority of the participants, who indicate these recurring thoughts and behaviors, are among the ones who were forcibly recruited for several years. It is this group of participants who earlier linked their past with the rebels and their imprisonment duo to their own behavior or stigmatization by others.

Several participants demonstrate how they found ways to cope with the challenges they encounter in prison and make the reality of their current 'being' easier to bear. When confronted with intrusive memories of their past, feeling irritated or having headaches for instance, participants cope with it by mentally and physically isolating themselves; interviewees for example talk about staying alone in a corner or becoming very quiet. Another commonly used method is to surrender oneself to faith. Participants express how God is commonly called upon during the most difficult moments they encounter.

Several participants highly value the counseling in prison provided by organizations, as they consider it to be helpful. They explain how talking to a counselor helps to keep a focus towards the future and restores hope of getting released and going back home one day. Interviewees express that counseling sessions (individually or in group) are helpful because it supports them to feel released from "bad feelings" and empowers them in becoming strong and confident human beings again. Winnie illustrates:

"The counseling is also very helpful. They tell me that when you committed a crime, you
need to apologize and the person will forgive you. When I go back home, I now know how to
communicate and stay with others like the community members and neighbors."

In addition, some participants also join the drama groups offered by organizations. They narrate how they are busy preparing a piece of theater and have to perform a play monthly. Participation in these drama groups is strongly appreciated. Interviewees feel as if the different stories they have to play, teach them something useful such as the right behaviors one should have within a group or community. They feel as it helps them prepare for their re-entry in their communities. Winnie clarifies:

"I am in the drama group. It makes life easier, because it helps me to forget about troubles
at home. It is a preparation for my return: I am getting lessons that I didn't know before

like on how to live in a group or community, what law says when you commit a crime, and
what not to do to your friends."

Furthermore, the appreciation towards the counseling sessions and drama groups reflects the participants' big need of a sense of belonging: the fact that a counselor is giving them individual attention, provides a listening ear, and shows care towards them is immensely valued. In addition, the opportunity to form groups also provides a platform to feel part of something bigger together with others, caring for one another. Participants express how these sources of support strongly contribute to make life in imprisonment more bearable, and give hope that there is still a future ahead of them wherein they can still become the person they aspire to be.

Almost all participants crave for learning opportunities. They articulate a strong wish to get training and to learn skills they can use after they get released such as hairdressing, carpentry, mechanics, building etc. Next to that, a big majority of interviewees wish to have some kind of legal support. They want somebody who takes care of their case and thus helps building on that hope for a future on the other side of the prison bars.

The participants also talk about what support would be helpful to them and what they would like to happen once they leave the prison and go back home. Daniel narrates:

"I would like to get help to generate a business but also counseling, so my wife can also
understand that it was not me who committed the crime and that I was only here because
they suspected me."

Next to stressing the need for materials to restart building life (farming tools, sewing machine, cattle, capital…), their statements clearly express the need to be guided and supported in their relations to others. Jack explains:

"When I go back home, I would like for somebody to help me not to think about past events
and change my life, be friendly with the community, and to not fight anymore."

The majority would feel supported by somebody who helps them with the (re)socialization process in the community and start (re)building a "positive life".

These statements demonstrate how the participants generally still have the potential to imagine a brighter tomorrow. By expressing what would be resourceful, it is proven that a sparkle of hope and dreams towards their future are still inherent to them even though they do

not directly perceive it that way themselves. That future self is characterized by a strong will to break with the past, to connect and belong to others, and to become the person they aspire to be.

V. Discussion

To the present day, the complex realities lived by formerly recruited children and youth in imprisonment have stayed unaddressed in research. Through the analysis of twenty in-depth interviews with formerly recruited youth in prison, this study provides a unique view on how they narrate the struggles, successes and wishes regarding their reintegration process and imprisonment.

In the next sections, the themes emerging from the participants' stories will be linked with the broader theoretical framework that constitutes the transition concept. Parallels will be drawn with a cognitive developmental approach to transition (Piaget, 1977). The theory of Piaget supports explanations on how people cope with challenges through growing cognitive capacities. Furthermore, the cognitive developmental approach will be combined with an anthropological approach to transition (Vogler, Crivello, & Woodhead, 2008), which provides a supplementary contextual dimension to the transition concept. Combining these two approaches will create a larger framework, allowing an interdisciplinary perspective on transition and a more profound understanding of participants' narratives (Vindevogel et al., 2013; Vogler et al., 2008). The transitional lens will be applied to the reintegration process before imprisonment and subsequently during imprisonment. Ultimately, this will lead to the formulation of implications and recommendations for practice and research.

1. Reintegration as a transitional process

1.1. The transitional process before imprisonment

The course of life is defined by significant moments, which herald a change process; this is generally known as the offset of a "transition" process (Vogler et al., 2008). The transition lens is applicable regarding children and youth's return from the rebel group and the subsequent process of reintegration (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005; Jareg, 2005). Transition starts when the FRCAY leave the armed group and return home and implies the need to disconnect oneself from the military lifestyle and its specific framework for conveyance of meaning regarding personal development and being-in-the-world (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005; Jareg, 2005). Transition is a process wherein one gradually emerges oneself with a new sense of identity and belonging (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005; Wessels, 2006a). This process is also reflected in the broader idea on reintegration according to the 2007 Paris Principles (Unicef)—the prominent document providing guidelines on reintegration of FRCAY. These guidelines consider reintegration as the

process through which they transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians (Unicef, 2007; Vindevogel et al., 2013a).

When returning home from the warring faction, the transformation of setting, living conditions and role can possibly provoke confusion and impose challenges towards one's sense of identity and belonging (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005; Wessels, 2006b). Participants express this as the distress caused by recurrent thoughts, feelings and behaviors related to their past with the rebels, difficulties regarding social relationships with family and community, and struggles regarding education and livelihood. This confirms previous research findings on the major challenges imposing the lives of FRCAY (Annan et al., 2009; Boothby, 2006a; Corbin, 2008; Vindevogel et al., 2014). Within the new setting at home, FRCAY discover how their past rebel-identity does not match what is considered to be 'appropriate' (Wessels, 2006).

Applying the cognitive developmental perspective, this aforementioned issue is tackled when FRCAY revise the cognitive schemata that represent their view on the world (Piaget, 1977). Hence, participants are able to move forward through attempts to make a break with their past, which is in line with previous findings on FRCAY's efforts to break with the former identity and forget about the past (Annan et al., 2009; Boothby, 2006a; Corbin, 2008; Veale & Stavrou, 2007; Vindevogel et al., 2013a). The participants indicate the use of coping skills or cognitive and behavioral efforts to deal with distress, the pursuit of social acceptance and rebuilding relationships, and the beneficial effects of getting an education and restoring livelihoods. Resources allowed them to rebuild a new frame of reference and identity.

From an ecological anthropological perspective, transition is considered as a communal process (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Geurts, 2002; Grimes, 2002; Vogler et al., 2008). This means that the transitional process also needs to be framed in relation to others. In this study, participants confirm this idea by indicating how resources and challenges arise from their expectations towards others. Moreover, they express how they value support by family and friends to find release from disturbing thoughts, feelings and behaviors related to the past and how their help enables them to build on social acceptance, education and livelihood. Several participants value how the community made attempts to reconnect with them while others indicate the negative impact of community's rejection and stigmatization. This again confirms findings of earlier studies on the importance of close and caring relationships with family and community (Annan et al., 2009; Corbin, 2008; Steen Kryger & Lowe Lindgren, 2011).

With regard to the encountered challenges and resources, interventions of professional agencies (can) fulfill a key role. Participants felt helped by professionals' support to release them from emotional and behavioral difficulties, restore social relationships and acceptance, and to invest in education and livelihood.

Not all participants did receive (enough of) the agencies' help. They experienced it as very painful to see how others did get (more) help in spite of equally pressing needs. In addition, youth commonly express the way the provided support needs to be more thoroughly; they want support to continue for a longer time span and express the need to be followed-up in time. The development of a new social role and identity requires an immense amount of energy and time. A lot of participants do not feel supported profoundly enough for this process to flourish completely.

All of these findings show that challenges and resources affect one's process of obtaining a new sense of identity and belonging (Becker, 1999; Grimes, 2002). Gradually finding a new sense of balance in one's social role and identity is a result of progress in the transitional process and offers a firm base to further develop as a person (Piaget, 1977; Turner, 1967). In this study, participants commonly confirm they built up a life wherein they achieved a sense of equilibrium through new social roles and identities. They retrieved and reached a certain level of satisfaction with regards to their 'being' before they were incarcerated. As Boothby's longer-term study (2006a) also confirmes, it is almost impossible to be totally free from the past. Still, for about half of the participants—most commonly those who were abducted for the shortest periods— the biggest struggles seemed to diminish over time. Their past was considered a part of life they could largely leave behind them. Even though the other half of participants—a majority of them being the ones who were abducted for several years—also felt quite happy with their life but the transition to a new social role and identity was still being hampered to a larger extent. Ongoing difficulties with community stigmatization and recurrent thoughts, feelings, and behaviors were interfering daily life more frequently. Boothby's study (2006a) equally indicates how youth who were recruited for a shorter period seemed to do well over time, while those who were abducted for several years, experienced ongoing struggles.

1.2. The transitional process upon imprisonment

Imprisonment imposes a brutal detachment from any obtained level of transition. Half of the participants—a majority of them are the ones who were recruited for several years—explicitly indicate their detainment is linked with their child soldiering past. This link can be partly explained from the cognitive developmental perspective (Piaget, 1977), as some of them did not yet manage to develop a complete new cognitive framework of reference. When experiencing challenging circumstances, these participants tend to revert to behaviors which are linked with their past with the rebels and which are socially not accepted. They illuminate how this behavior is the cause to their incarceration. The link with their past can also partly be explained from the anthropological perspective emphasizing the communal aspect of transition (Geurts, 2002;

Grimes, 2002), as others narrate how people in their environment create challenges through ongoing stigmatization related to their child soldiering past. They point out how their former identity as a recruited youth made others to suspect them of being the perpetrator of a crime.

The behavioral issues and stigmatization demonstrate that, though these participants tried to break with the rebel-identity, they did not yet completely obtain the new identity as a civilian and accepted member of society. Transition was not yet fully completed. It is to say that these interviewees' lives were still characterized by "liminality" to a certain extent. This means that one finds himself somewhere in between his preceding state and his pending state, not fully belonging the former nor fitting into the latter (Becker, 1999; Grimes, 2002; Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1960; Vindevogel, 2013).

Regardless if participants indicate they still had difficulties with their behavior or stigmatization before entering prison, all of them characterize the life stage in detention by the loss of the social role they were trying to rebuild or already had rebuilt. Therefore, ending up in prison strengthens the feeling of "liminality" that already existed on the part of the participants who indicated difficulties with behavior or stigmatization. On the part of the participants who did not indicate these lasting difficulties with behavior or stigmatization, entering prison makes them enter a stage of "liminality" too: they feel no longer to be the civilian they had become and they are not yet the civilian they desire to be, participating in society. Since this position is very demanding psychologically as well as physically, researchers stress that the better the physical needs are fulfilled, the easier it is to deal with challenging circumstances on a psychological level (Allwood, Bell-Dolan, & Husain, 2002; Corbin, 2008; Cortes & Buchanan, 2007).

The interviews reveal that loss of a social role, together with the (physically) harsh living conditions in prison, and the uncertainty towards the future, weigh very heavy on the participants and their resilient potential. As a result, they narrate about new challenges and a (total) loss of hope. Yet, previous research findings strongly emphasize the importance of having a sense of hope and orientation towards the future (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). This situation imposes a major detrimental risk towards the onset of a future transitional process towards all participants.

For one third of the youth—mainly those who were recruited for several years and indicate a link between their past and imprisonment—the incarceration even has more far-reaching implications. They explicitly draw parallels between their 'being' in imprisonment and their 'being' in captivity with the rebel group. The similarities tend to bring back feelings, thoughts, and behaviors linked to their past with the rebels. This imposes even more challenges towards the transitional process.

Despite the overwhelming feeling that hope has gone, participants generally demonstrate how they are still able to imagine and talk about a brighter future and

subsequently take initiatives to cope with the current 'being' in detainment, for instance by attaining possibilities for counseling. Another example is the way participants crave for opportunities to learn new life skills through getting trainings in prison. They indicate how these skills would be useful in their life after imprisonment.

From a developmental perspective, the participants' cognitive abilities to explore new possibilities and imagine how a better future could look like, allow them to deal with their encountered challenges and still change their life (Piaget, 1977).

Participants express how the support of social agencies can guide them, which is indicative of how this support inflames a transitional process. Moreover, participants value how professional caregivers provide support through relieving them from emotional distress, work with them on socially accepted codes of conduct, and re-install a sense of hope for the future. From a developmental perspective, this means the participants again reassess their cognitive schemes representing the understanding of the world, so as to obtain a re-equilibration of their worldview (Piaget, 1977). The anthropological perspective considering transition as a communal process (Geurts, 2002; Grimes, 2002) comes to the forefront too. Participants emphasize the importance of activities they can attend in prison, for they generate a sense of belonging through the care of professionals. In addition, they indicate how the lack of support through visits of family and friends is a major challenge to their sense of belonging.

All of this illustrates the immeasurable amount of resilience inherent to people when confronted with adversities. In prison, there are thus still openings to grasp and reconnect with their transitional process that was ongoing before their imprisonment. Participants strive towards making their current state of 'being' bearable again and towards creating a perspective on the future.

Thinking about the day they will re-enter their communities, participants commonly wish for support to deal with distressing feelings, thoughts and behaviors, social relations and acceptance, and education and livelihood. The expected challenges are strikingly similar to the ones indicated when they returned from "the bush". The participants expect that when returning home after imprisonment the offset of another transition process will be established, with a new vigorous and intense pursuit to break with the past, to belong to others and to become the person one aspires to be, a fully accepted and functional member of society.

2. Implications for practice

2.1. The transitional process before imprisonment

It is important to be aware how stereotypes that tend to "pathologize" formerly recruited children and youth as killers and aggressive misfits appear not to be legitimate (Annan et al., 2009; Denov, 2010), not even on the part of FRCAY who ended up in prison. These stereotypes ignore the complexity of reality. The incarceration is not always experienced as a direct consequence of the rebel past. With regard to the participants who were recruited for less than one year, a majority of them do not perceive their imprisonment to be a consequence of their past with the rebels. With regard to the participants who were recruited for several years, though a majority explicitly links their incarceration to their past with the rebel group, only a part of them attribute their imprisonment to their own behavioral problems resulting from their rebel past. The other part indicates stigmatization due to their child soldiering past as the cause of their current imprisonment. Note that the Ugandan judicial system does not provide a reliable buffer mechanism towards subjectivism and unjustified imprisonment.

This study indicates that when customizing interventions, the duration of one's recruitment is an important factor to take into account. Especially for those participants who were recruited for several years, the transition process appears to be the most challenging and their past creates more longer-term and more persisting difficulties. These findings are in line with other studies discouraging a one-size-fits-all approach (Annan et al., 2009; Wessels, 2009) and indicating that longer time spent in captivity can be a risk factor for poor longer-term reintegration outcomes (Boothby, 2006a; Denov, 2010; Rodriguez, Smith-Derksen, & Akera, 2002). Concretely, the results of this study suggest that what may be needed for FRCAY who were recruited for several years, is more profound and longer-lasting training of new, socially acceptable, behavioral responses towards distressing triggers. In addition, to counter the stigmatization it seems important to invest more profoundly in explaining the community how the FRCAY were forced to commit atrocities during their recruitment and how this does not mean they have to be considered criminals who will persist to perpetrate cruelties once they leave the rebel group and re-enter the community as a civilian. This amplifies previous findings stressing the importance of community-based programs (Annan et al., 2009; Boothby, 2006b; Corbin, 2008).

To fully address the array of experienced challenges, the study seems to suggest that the support given to FRCAY should be expanded in general. Giving support should be extended in time since ending the help too soon is experienced as jeopardizing the effectiveness of the offered help. Previous research also indicates that the support of humanitarian bodies should be

profound and longlasting enough (Boothby, 2008; Bolton & Betancourt, 2004; Wessels, 2006). Concretely, intervention programs could invest in reaching every FRCAY wanting and needing support. Temporarily support could be replaced by more structural solutions, for instance in stead of paying FRCAY's tuition fees for a few years, investing in income generating activities for them and their families could provide a more sustainable solution towards having access to education.

2.2. The transitional process upon imprisonment

The study findings suggest that intervention programs should continue even during detention, and one should even then take into consideration the duration of recruitment as an important factor when customizing these support programs.

The participants generally express to have the need for support in prison. These needs appear to be very similar to the needs they had during their transitional process before detention. Again, they indicate challenges regarding psychological distress, social relationships, and learning opportunities. Therefore, they wish for support on these areas. Longer recruited participants struggle, in addition, with recurrent thoughts and feelings related to their past as recruited youth. This suggests that what may be needed is the design of comprehensive prison programs consisting of counseling and skills trainings. Counseling could give the FRCAY an opportunity to share their worries, to feel supported and not left alone. Counselors can be extra attentive towards those FRCAY who were recruited for several years to tackle recurring thoughts and feelings due to their time with the rebel group. In addition, it seems recommendable to organize workshops addressing social skills such as conflict mitigation and confidence building, next to workshops teaching income generating activities such as hairdressing or tailoring. In order for these initiatives to reach their full potential, material support, such as medical care or a nutritious diet, seems to be *a priori* indispensable.

Providing support in prison not only helps to render the current state as 'inmate' more bearable, it helps them to look hopeful towards the future. It could also contribute to prohibiting a total stop or setback of the transitional process. As the study reveals that FRCAY crave for support during their detention, this shows that when FRCAY are in detention, there are still openings to grasp and to reconnect with their transitional process.

Focusing on the future, the interviews reveal that participants expect the need for support on psychological, social and livelihood levels even after imprisonment. They express the fear that everything that has been achieved before imprisonment, can be destructed by the time they re-enter society. The aforementioned prison programs can proactively address the

expected difficulties. It seems also recommendable to prepare families receiving the former inmate in order to anticipate stigmatization and to provide a follow-up, monitoring the new transitional process that offsets after imprisonment.

Continuing the intervention programs during detention can prohibit that interventions after detention should start all over again from scratch. Providing more support during detention would prohibit a total freezing or even total collapse of the transitional process. It would allow for the transitional process to continue during detention and facilitate the transitional process that will offset once they re-enter the society after detention.

3. Recommendations for research

Since this study reveals the need of support during detention, it can be interesting to conduct more research in order to obtain a profound understanding of what this support should entail exactly and how this support can prepare them for the transitional process that will offset once the formerly recruited youth re-enter the society after detention.

To be able to conduct this research to the full extent, it is important to also study the course of the transitional process after the formerly recruited youth leave prison. By creating a grounded understanding on (how) the challenges and resources shape this post-detention trajectory, it will be possible to design effective support programs during detention. In addition, interventions in prison can be better adjusted to the needs after imprisonment.

4. Limitations of the study

A local bilingual translator translated the interviews from Lango to English. The participant's responses were represented through the translator's interpretation of nuances, tone and meaning, which may have been different from the intent of the participant (Murray & Wynne, 2001). Since it was prohibited to record the interviews, the translations were captured in extended field notes. The process of translation and the limited extensiveness of notes possibly led to loss of information and may have constrained the exhaustiveness and richness of the data, putting limits to the in-depth analysis of respondent's accounts (Marecek, 2003).

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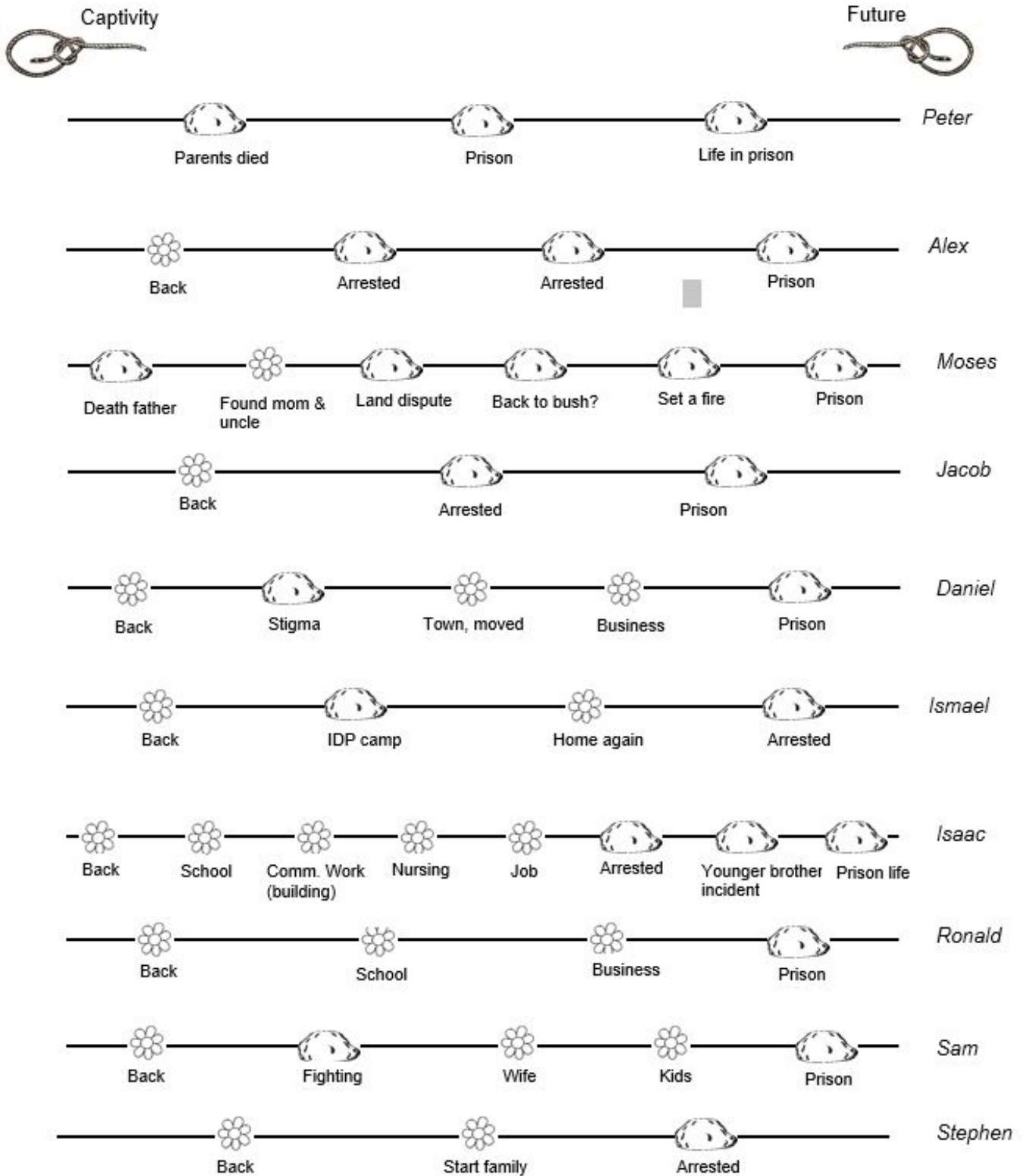
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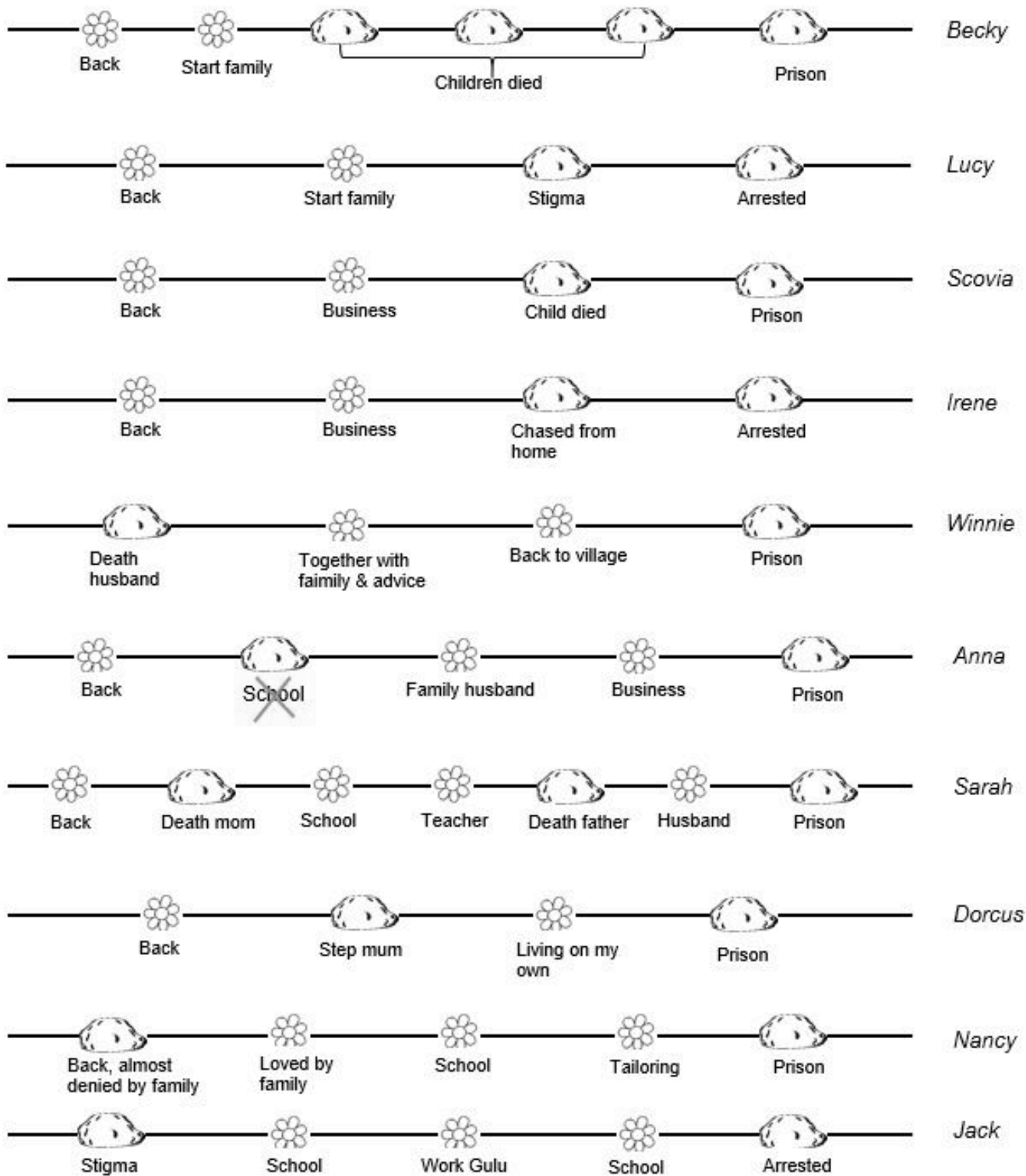## A. Demographic figures

Age, recruitment status, and prison status

Name*	Age**	Recruitment status**			Prison status**		
		Age recr.	Age return	Time recr.	Age prison	Time spent	Remaining
Peter	22	15	20	5 years	20	2 years	11 years
Alex	32	17	25	8 years	32	6 months	undefined
Moses	36	28	30	2 years	35	1 year	undefined
Jacob	20	12	12	8 months	20	7 months	undefined
Daniel	23	13	15	2 years	21	2 years	undefined
Ismael	35	25	25	4 months	35	7 months	undefined
Isaac	25	14	14	1 month	24	1 year	undefined
Ronald	35	17	17	1 month	35	4 months	undefined
Sam	22	7	11	4 years	21	1 year	undefined
Stephen	28	21	24	4 years	28	8 months	undefined
Becky	23	14	14	1 week	23	2 months	undefined
Lucy	30	18	20	2 years	28	2 years	6 years
Scovia	28	14	14	4 months	27	1 year	undefined
Irene	28	14	20	6 years	28	3 months	7 months
Winnie	35	26	26	1 month	35	3 months	undefined
Anna	22	10	10	1 month	22	2 weeks	undefined
Sarah	34	17	17	3 months	34	5 months	undefined
Dorcus	20	12	12	6 months	20	6 months	undefined
Nancy	14	18 months	7	5,5 years	14	1 month	undefined
Jack	23	14	16	2 years	21	2 years	undefined

* All names are pseudonyms to protect the participants' identity
** Because the participants were not always sure about exact age, age regarding recruitment status, and age regarding prison status, figures are possibly not 100% accurate

B. Lifelines

Captivity — Future

Peter
Parents died — Prison — Life in prison

Alex
Back — Arrested — Arrested — Prison

Moses
Death father — Found mom & uncle — Land dispute — Back to bush? — Set a fire — Prison

Jacob
Back — Arrested — Prison

Daniel
Back — Stigma — Town, moved — Business — Prison

Ismael
Back — IDP camp — Home again — Arrested

Isaac
Back — School — Comm. Work (building) — Nursing — Job — Arrested — Younger brother incident — Prison life

Ronald
Back — School — Business — Prison

Sam
Back — Fighting — Wife — Kids — Prison

Stephen
Back — Start family — Arrested

Becky — Back · Start family · [Children died] · Prison

Lucy — Back · Start family · Stigma · Arrested

Scovia — Back · Business · Child died · Prison

Irene — Back · Business · Chased from home · Arrested

Winnie — Death husband · Together with faimily & advice · Back to village · Prison

Anna — Back · School (crossed out) · Family husband · Business · Prison

Sarah — Back · Death mom · School · Teacher · Death father · Husband · Prison

Dorcus — Back · Step mum · Living on my own · Prison

Nancy — Back, almost denied by family · Loved by family · School · Tailoring · Prison

Jack — Stigma · School · Work Gulu · School · Arrested

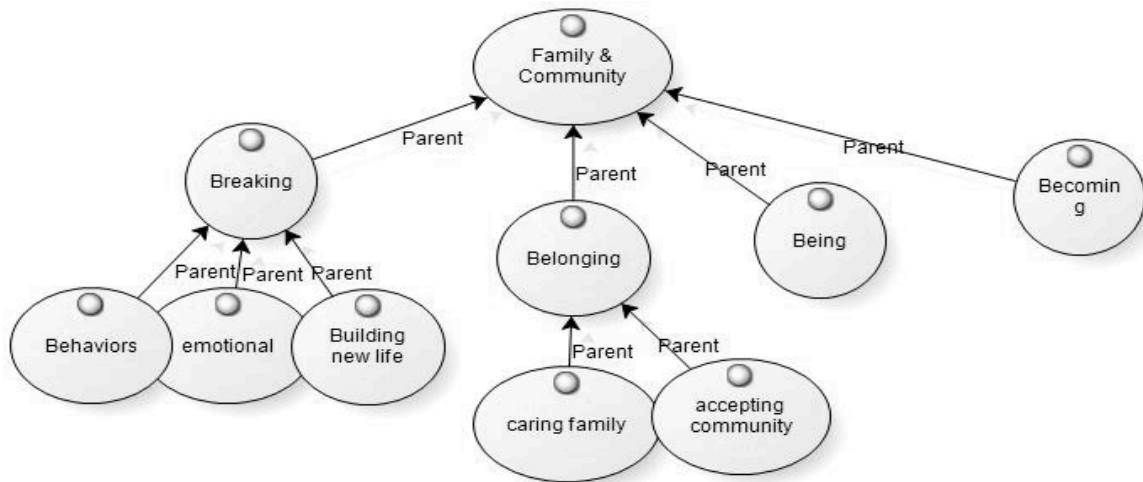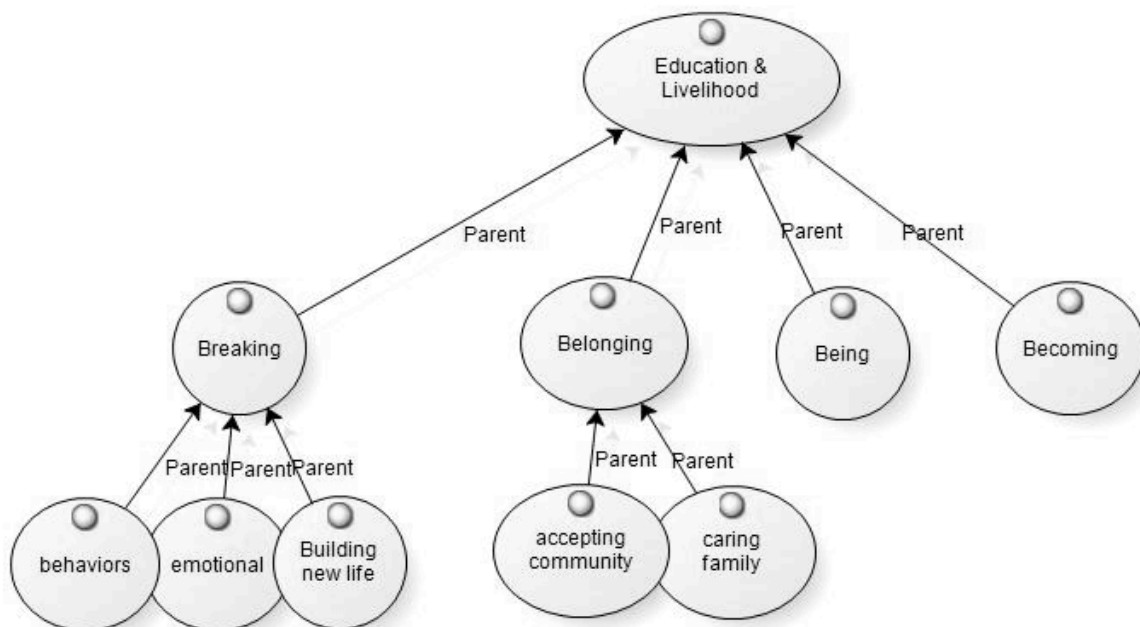# C. Structure trees Nvivo

Theme 1: family & community

Theme 2: education & livelihood

Theme 3: imprisonment